TREES

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TREES

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By

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"Thoughts that smile and weep,
Dreams that hallow sleep,
Brood in the branching shadows
of the trees."

I know nothing whatever about trees. If I did, I would be writing of any other matter.

℔ For what barren little text-books may be produced within the limits of knowledge! and none, but some pedant with a grain more of knowledge than yourself will have produced a better text-book on your own theme. But when I speak of that I do not know, I show my pedants a pair of heels, Perseus-sandalled, with a golden feather of fancy and the blue wing of a dream; and I rise where they cannot follow, wag they their heads never so wisely sitting spectacled in a ditch.

℔ And

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And for those who expected, perhaps desired, knowledge of me, here is all my little store to begin with, exhaustible in a few breaths.

I have a friend who lives among the loveliest woods of Berkshire, and I wish she were at my elbow, for she knows trees from the outside as well as from the inside ; and on the rare occasions when I share her wood-life she will now and then instruct me as to the night-jar's note, or the name of a rosy butterfly, or how to find Arcturus, or differentiate between ground-ivy and that other blue flower whose name I have already forgotten. But mostly she will teach me the way of knowing a chestnut in its youth, or an elm in its nakedness, or a willow that has not yet learned sorrow. Alas, I remember none of these things longer than a day and a night, and rely now only on the things which I cannot recollect having been taught. Few children could tell less.

What I know, then, is an oak by its leaf and frequently by its shape; a birch when it is white enough; a willow when it weeps low enough; the race of pine and fir in a general way, without snobbish distinctions of class and cousin-ship; the mountain-ash when she is wearing her rubies; most (I think) of the English flowering trees when they are in flower, and all (I am nearly certain) of the English fruit-bearing trees when they are bearing fruit; the plane who does so bravely for the cities, and I live in a city, so was bound in gratefulness to ask his name; beeches of the coppery order, and I shall know the green kind too when I have got by heart the black velvet shadow on its smooth grey bough; and to end with, there is at least one of the tribe of poplars that cannot deceive me.

And now, young student, go your ways, and let me about mine—or will you linger to hear a word of what I do not know, but only believe? Then, very hastily (for I

perceive you standing in unwilling deference, cap in hand) :

I believe that trees are interpreters of a secret between man and God ; I believe that their branches are hands reached out to you, and the wind in their leaves is speech to you ; I believe that beneath their rind the sap makes mysterious response to his blood who leans upon them in his need ; I believe that leaves spotted red and yellow, picked up by daylight for their lovely shapes and colours, were fairy treasure under last night's moon ; I believe the elder is a tree bewitched, and I pray never to be caught with a sprig of her white bloom when the twelfth hour strikes upon the Eve of Saint John ; I believe that when the chestnut breaks into peaks of flower it is celebrating its birthday with candles pink and white ; I believe that he who holds cones and acorns in his hand, holds in his hand a forest of pine and oak ; and this too of pines, that when you stand among their pillars in a dark blue night of

May, and hear the dry stillness broken by innumerable tiny patterings that seem like dropping rain, it is the sound of pine-cones shutting their fifty little doorways against the fall of the dark; I believe——

O no! I see you will have none of me. "That last is pure silliness!" you say. (Yet it was told me by one who lives among pines.) "Your knowledge should keep pace with your beliefs," you say. (Friend, my knowledge goes on pattens, but my beliefs run in seven-leagued boots; and they have not yet compassed the twentieth part of their journey: be patient, friend!) "And as to your knowledge," you say, "it was worse than none; for you speak quite profitlessly of knowing this and that, since knowledge consists in knowing how and why you know what you do know, which is a thing you forgot to mention." Then clap cap to head, young student, and fare you well in Pan's name. I cannot tell you how and why I know what I said I knew, or what profit

might lie in knowing how and why I know it: any more than I can explain for what possibly logical and certainly detestable purpose a person I desire never to meet has cut down two poplars that were once the glorious possession of the back-windows in a block of Hampstead houses. To him I would put one question: What shall be done to the destroyers of temples? and if, like the wicked queens on the last page of the fairy-tale, he fell into my trap and pronounced (as I hope he would) a horrid doom on all iconoclasts, I would invent for him a little fable. In fact, I shall invent it now; partly for his benefit in the unlikely event of its coming under his eye, but chiefly because it contains a breath of the spirit which leads me to write, in despite of ignorance, of what I love.

I begin by picturing the Gods when they were quarrelling for the dominion of the stars. It must have been so mighty a

quarrel that it is a little surprising we have not heard of it, for they were ardent brawlers, and it is difficult to believe that divinities who could make matter for wrangling out of an apple, or a girdle, or a herd of silly oxen, established peaceably the order of the heavens. In some era, then, before the Golden Age, the high Gods bickered for possession of the stars ; and Chronos, who as a rule gets more than his share, sat among a litter of moons and oddments with hammer and chisel, chipping his name in one corner of a planet with all the quietness possible to time. As he chipped, a Thing with Hoofs made three leaps through the firmament, and landed in swinging posture on a ring of fire which the Old God had just hung up by way of effect.

"Don't touch those things," snapped the Old God. He has never been young.

"Why not ?" said the Hoofed One, who will never be old.

"Because they are my things."

"Perishable reasoning, O Chronos !

destroyer

destroyer of the possessor and the possession."

"Well, the Gods also like their little bit," mumbled the Old One, chipping away with his chisel.

"I come from seeing it. Even the Winged Horse has acquired a smattering of the lesser stars, and is stamping them with his name. Aries carves his with a sword, Zeus writes his in lightnings. Chiselling, that's your way. But the meaning is the same: This is Mine, and this *Mine*, and this—MINE. To what end, Chronos?"

"To this end," said the Old God, "that man may know our names by our enduring temples, and his worship be ours for ever."

"His worship of what? For the sword is death, and the lightning swift destruction, and only that which crumbles may be chiselled. O Chronos, look to your Sand-glass. The worship of a name!"

"It is something; it is better than a name forgotten."

"Of what profit to remember the nut-shell if the kernel remain unplanted? Old Chronos, I shall go a-planting my little kernels, and man may forget the planter's name as swiftly as he will. The seed is always the seed. I shall be manifest! He shall worship me when he knows it not. He shall hear the song within my temples. He shall be filled with me, he shall possess me. Do not in folly attempt to possess man; for who knows better than you how possessions slip through the fingers? If you would live in him for ever, make him not yours, be his. Then, though you slip in turn the grasp of every generation, each new wave out of creation shall in turn catch you up and utter you, and by its own voice know you for divinity. Ah! when you of the Sand-glass, and he of the Sword, and she of the Girdle, and all the rest, are but the shells of names to man by whose grace we exist, I shall be manifest, I shall be manifest!"

"Have

"Have you then found a bigger star than mine?" cried the Old One in alarm. "With many moons and brighter hoops of fire? What were you doing while we were raking the firmament?"

"Dancing, Old Bones, dancing."

"And where?"

"On earth, with man my brother."

"With him who should adore you? With him who should dream of you across vast distances? With him who should be prostrate? With him to whom you should be the Unapproachable, the Unrevealed? How he will despise you, poor Godling-Beast."

"O Chronos! how he will love me. Though he forget my name, and calls no star for me, how he will love me."

"And your temple, scorner of the eternal stars?"

"Temple, scorner of the eternal earth—*temple*? Temples! a million million. Built as the very symbol of man's body and soul,

so that beneath their shadow he shall lean a little nearer to his own divinity, and be a little wiser of the splendour of his life. To him their roots shall typify his own, till both appear inextricably twined in the embracing scheme, and he shall know the glory whence he springs ; their sap to him shall seem the song of his blood, and in that common song he shall hear joyous creation pushing its brimming forces to expression ; their branches, the life he spreads upon the world in his ascent, shoots laden with hidden seed whose quickening has its springs in his own being ; their crowns, the visible summit of his soul's perfection before, slipping the ultimate sheath, it enters the imperishable unseen. My temples ! they shall teem upon the open mountains, and be gathered hungrily into the walled towns ; they shall rise beside clear waters and make them holy ; they shall decay in multitudes, and in greater multitudes rebuild themselves ere they decay. Through each I shall have passed, within each have

 breathed ;

breathed; earth shall bear them to me, humanity shall plant them in my unwhispered name, they shall create and recreate themselves when your moons are turned to ice. To them man shall come for healing and for comfort; in them he shall hear a voice hymning the mysteries that are green in his own spirit; other Gods shall arise when you are dusty names, and I shall dare to exist beside them who to you will spell annihilation; for I have built where they cannot destroy me without destroying the youth of man—and that is to destroy his dream of the youth of the soul. To the world's end there shall be no child that lives to lusty youth but once he shall pipe with me and dance with me and find me in my temple: whether beneath the burnished shelter of the beech, or the light spray of the ash, or the lone thoughts of the pine, or the fine struggle of the plane to be still green within his city streets.

"You erect your temples too remote from

the soul of man, Old God ; you build where his body cannot come to worship. You separate yourselves from his being, instead of making him know that you and he are one great harmony within one universe. And when in the fullness of time the shrines his hands have reared to us crumble with his beliefs, and our names are hollow things, man will deny you. But until he denies his very nature, he cannot deny me ; for of his nature I have made my fane.

❧ " Come closer to him, Chronos. Where you sit you cannot see his eyes shine or hear the singing of his blood. Come down, come closer, come ! "

❧ " Go dance, Beast," said the Old One, and fell to polishing his seventh moon with the sands of time.

❧ And the beast who stands midway betwixt man and God has danced ever since, and men have worshipped beneath his temples, and the few have known it and the many have known it not.

℣ Now what shall be done with the destroyers of temples?

℣ In asking, I am very well aware that the iconoclast is he whom the age delights to honour, and temples both visible and invisible are being razed ruthlessly as things too long permitted to stand now that their manifest purpose is past. I cannot unite with those who serve destruction so idolatrously. Too often their zeal confuses the temple with the false worshipper therein, and seeks to reduce both to common ruin. Theirs is the intolerant Christian spirit that shattered the world's wonder at Ephesus in the fourth century of Christ—Christ's Self already forgotten. Let them attack hypocrisy serving the shrine, the parasite self-interest fawning on the ideal; and leave the shrine and the ideal erect. Old legends where beauty walks in mystic light are true legends still, and ancient altars where faith once lit its starry flame are holy places still, for they have been

breathed on by eternal types. I cannot with the disbelievers sneer, "But it is necessary to the progress of the age these things should go." What small material necessity can the age produce to justify the upheaval of the haunts of olden dreams? Does it answer: The cause of knowledge, the necessity for truth? Well, no age can fix the standards of truth and knowledge for the individual, they are things which every new-born soul must grope for within itself; and standards of truth and knowledge fixed for the multitude are as evanescent as manners and as fashions. Meanwhile each generation that complies with the hard-headed creed will urge as paramount its new material need, and seek to sweep another vision out; and I sigh for the generation that will dawn with the death of the last dream. It will be further removed from truth than are sun-worshipping savages.—And, to recapture the gist of all this (for, tracing a random branch, I have not quite lost sense of what pith in the

parent trunk first started it) : What small material necessity, I wonder, egged the Iconoclast of Hampstead to his murder of my poplars? No doubt he had his own bleak reason, yet these noble twins who guarded the meeting of the gardens could have offered no annoyance to the house (O House that did not know itself blessed among houses!); nor does one ravish green walled plots for firewood. Then what was your reason, man of sluggish blood? Some stiffish sort of reason, that clung about your knee-caps like cast plaster, and would not let you drop in worship beside those lofty columns of the temple. When you worship, if you do worship, be it for ever more beneath a roof of tin. I warn you, there is danger else. Your deed is known to plank and beam and rafter. You cannot be a wanton slayer of trees and hope to keep it from the wood. If this comes to your eyes, you will sneer; but then you are of those who have ceased to thrill with the spring.

It takes a sort of courage, I suppose, to attack the eternal types — courage of the kind possessed by the Fallen Angel and the suburban jerry-builder in their losing battles against the innocence and the beauty of the world. The suburban fiend may not suspect that they are working to the same end, their means differing so widely; for the greater devil would preserve beauty, but pervert it to his own uses, while the lesser (whose nightly dream must be of endless little rows of little houses, clinging together like strings of indistinguishable paper dolls,) would probably plead that he merely smashes beauty in the cause of order and respectability, his better names for virtue. He would be horrified to be told that he is smashing virtue as he smashes beauty: that he makes stalled cab-hacks of us who were born Centaurs. And in spite of all he has done, the garden-plots of Hampstead are still wonderful at the full flood of summer. Their peoples are no new imported blood,

but

but the last stragglers of an ancient race; and the voice of wind that is more eloquent among them than is the voice of ocean in a shell speaks of an old green life now buried beneath black asphalt and grey pavement, where tall blank houses lift their vacant fronts, as meaningless of that they cover as tombstones pretending to express the dust. What know this plaster and this mortar of the spirits whose graves they mark? There was a day when Grove End Road was really the end of a grove, when Elm-Tree Road was rich with elms, when Saint John's Wood was a wood indeed, I suppose (but will not inquire too closely, lest I disturb a vision I have of the dear Saint dwelling in a white shrine, on a spot where now they sell beer, among birds and flowering branches, and sweet grass); and when a leafy glory, still imaged by the heath upon our heights, flourished for windy miles on what is turned to miles of stifled suburbs, the jerry-builder's momentary triumph. At

night, when the dwellings of man are dumb and the temples of Pan grow eloquent, I have regained from the shadowy talk of our gardens their sense of an era unconfined by layers of brick and wooden lattice; and a train of nature-spirits, evokable by the very names after which we have called trees, awakes in humming speech. One cannot dwell without love upon the lovely sounds. Cypress is a veiled whisper, Elm a low, full murmur; and if Acacia is the hush of the wind, Sycamore is its wailing sigh. Mulberry drops the round note of a muffled bell, and what a liquid fall have Hazel and Laurel and Myrtle and Maple, and as hard to confine as flowing water are the names of water's dedicated twins, Willow and Osier. Cedar is good to ear and eye; Alder and Elder begin in light, and after gathering strength decline in mist; and Holly is a pleasant breath without an edge to it—a subtle cheat. Oak better fits his title to his character, and is a very primitive utterance; I think cave-

men talked in such terms before language was created. Aspen is a thin silver shiver of sound that does not wholly lean upon association.—When darkness covers the city these rustling spirits find their secret voices, some chanting lyrically, others more wistful as though they sing in trance ; but my window has grown deaf of an ear since the murder of the poplars. I have nowhere seen their equal among their kind ; they were twin Titans dreaming upon a mighty past within a present too narrow to contain it, and that perhaps is why they had to go : they were green fountains rushing up into the heavens, and falling earthward filled with the speech of stars. Two waves receded to the infinite flood, two channels to the immortal mystery were cut off, when those great prophets went to their sacrifice.

For since the divine Pagan dares to exist in harmony with the eternal spirit, trees, which are the temples of Pan, are also the

prophets of God. He laid his secret within all his creations as they passed between his hands, but to the trees he gave the key as well. They have a more perfect power of communication than anything in nature. Flowers are their own expression, they lock up nothing; they are complete moments that enchant and vanish. Mountains are sealed chambers, the secret they guard must be fought for or remain untouched; and they confront the darer with death. Their voices when they speak (but they speak rarely,) are awful; they warn and threaten and overwhelm, and tell nothing of the thing they know. The sea speaks, but one listens to her on the edge of peril, and, unless one becomes her master, the peril is at the seat of the soul; for the secret of the sea is not all of God, the strange lost magic of the black face of the moon is mingled with her voices and her waters. She does not always repel and resist after the fashion of the mountains, and it is when she most

glamorously

glamorously allures you into intimacy that she is most dangerous. The intimacy she offers is false ; there is no more revelation of her meaning in the things she says than there is in the song of a sea-witch sitting on a rock. The mariner dreams that her meaning is love, because she sings of it ; but her meaning is destruction. Of her own free will the sea will never yield her secret ; for all her seeming, she will never call man her brother ; sometimes she will call him master, and always she will wait upon the day when she may name him her drowned child. But the trees seek neither to enslave nor to be mastered ; they offer you as much as you can receive of what they hold ; they speak continually and intimately. Listen an instant to wind on water and on wood, the impressionable ghost tuned to its instrument. In the wave of the ocean its utterance is sorcery, thunder of djinns, or the siren's lure ; in the wave of the leaf its utterance is direct communication, a divine

voice. It is not easy to lift the veil that hangs between man and the green secret of life, but if he has discovered how to interpret into knowledge the speech of the sap in the leaf, he may with safety go as far as the knowledge will carry him. There lies no menace in that journey, it is the return of the soul to its cradle. Once more the spiritual memory extends beyond the accidents of existence and of death until it sinks within the common circle of whatever has birth and dies. In the prime of man, in the full fruit of the tree, it sees no culmination; and no annulment in the waning strength and glory—indeed, it beholds the naked tree and the spent man as standing always at the beginning, not at the end, of illimitable things. For an instant it is re-united with the timeless source of life whence all that is destructible and witherable is stripped.

Yet if in their Holy of holies they enshrine their birthright of a profound truth,

I would not deny to trees their peculiar magic also; only the black art which is innate to the wave without the need of legend to conjure it up, lurks in the branch most vividly when specific imagination has been at work beneath the shadow. For this reason we do not instinctively suspect the presence of enchantment in every copse and grove; and among the oppressed domestic trees—the trees we have caged for our benefit in the parks—it is useless to seek for it at all. Luckily for us, they do not know they are oppressed, and so there are still green breathing-spaces in our cities. Like wily politicians, we have lulled them to an indolent self-satisfaction with fair promises; we have made them secure of the axe, supplied them with the regulated attentions of which Nature is so negligent, propped them against accident, and shorn from them responsibility and independence. For this we only ask them to renounce a wild green ideal or so and assume the complacency of comfortable married folk

who, shedding the flame of life, have settled down (for "life," they sometimes say,) in a well-sounding district, with a sufficiency of gilt-edged securities in the bank. You mustn't disturb these really pleasant people by telling them they are done for ever with romance—the more impregnable the bars they place between themselves and the possible chances of suffering and discomfort, the further they are removed from the possible chances of sudden glamour, high adventure, and deep emotion. It would be not merely impolitic but cruelly ungrateful in us to force our park-trees to realize their limits. Quite low shrubs will hide the railings. (If only one did not suspect that all the time the trim, well-ordered ones know the railings are there—and like it.) Perhaps there are very young saplings out of view of the border who imagine they are living unconfined, and can escape into the jungle whenever they will. And the old ones nod indulgently. They know that the call of the

greenwood has ceased to be for them and theirs, that the perfect open-air lyric of Arden did not flow for such as they. Our ambitions dog us still beside the Serpentine, we listen to the band instead of turning our ear to the merry note of the bird—yet the birds do nest in the park, and the trees they nest in are beautiful and regal. Only, they have lost their magic. The municipal pruning-knife has been at work, lopping a mystery. And if ever through their sap imagination calls to them in the voices of their wildwood ancestry, they suppress it like well-bred ladies in their drawing-rooms, smiling down impulses as unrealities or dangers. The conventional life is not far removed in spirit from the conventual ; its safeguards and guarantees are as clearly and as narrowly defined : these deeps and those heights must remain unknown, though you were born with all the potentialities for knowing them : these emotions must remain unsounded, though they be of the primal

essence of life—and as what did you come upon earth but as life incarnate? who more than you? who shall sound and know it if you do not? was it not meant to be known and sounded?—Quick! take the veil, slip into your groove between the railings, dare not to look upon yourself. These lightning-flashes of the spirit that seem to lead to bewildering joy and knowledge may all be danger-signals, there may be risks in winning to joy and knowledge; let us be safe and satisfied, and muffle our ears to the calling from the wildwood.—Or shall we chance it? open arms to them, life's joyous dangers and magical unrealities? Take hands and run! not a woodland of the earth where imagination will not have run before us, beckoning. And to what elfin innocence may she lead us! In the Rhine country I have discovered the fairy thickets where little fir-trees dream on their one night of wonder, and the King's pears grow low that armless maids may eat of them at midnight as they hang; where

charcoal-

charcoal-burners build their smouldering fires, and penniless soldiers seek strange treasure through the cavern of a hollow trunk, and the tiniest brother of twelve drops milk-white pebbles to mark a path along the unknown glades. Tree-magic is not inevitably for ill. There are jolly ghosts in Sherwood, I am certain, and in many a Forest of Adventure you are as like to meet with the Knight-Errant as with the Questing Beast. Yet who has not also shivered in haunted woodlands that ever drifted wraith-like near Melisande crouching above her pool? or trod the forbidden ways where the Beautiful and Merciless One keeps princes and pale kings in thrall? or stolen in the steps of Leoline's daughter when, going forth in the midnight wood to pray for her distant lover, she came on evil moaning in the dark? or ever dreamed on charm-bound Broceliande? O that journey of the doting wizard and his secret nymph!—it is a continuous spell, and enchains the spirit long before the last utter-

ance of magic completes the dark enchantment. But where was flown the enamoured mystic's cunning, that the very names in that dim world of trees contained no warnings for him? The *Val Sans Retour*—was wisdom grown too deaf to heed the threat? The Valley of False Lovers—was wisdom grown too ancient to remember whither love-falseness leads? The *Fontaine de Juvence*—was wisdom grown so sick of its barren strength that it fain would cling to one mad hope of youth again, of folly again? would barter all the careful treasures won from dead experience for one green thrill of experience again?—youth's heart-throb in its mighty ignorance, with everything still to learn that joy and suffering can teach.—Or *was* this, after all, a folly on Merlin's part? Sometimes I think the chroniclers have misread the old magician; who out of his very wisdom knew where that sinister track through Broceliande must end, who desired of his false nymph not love but peace, and,

in communicating to her the fatal spell, did so relying on her treachery to use it swiftly on his exhausted body. And when beneath the working of that charm he passed for ever from men's sight into the heart of a great holly tree, did he not know it was a restoration of his spirit to its original spring, and bless the guile that re-created him a pulse of nature? "I ask never to return!" he might have answered to the moan of that first valley. "I bring the means!" to the light mockery of the second. And in the third and last, though the bright fountain-waters never passed his lips, he found eternal youth in its own temple. Listen at any tree-trunk, and hear it sing.

℘ This, I think, is the secret given into the keeping of the trees, the open secret they deliver in a thousand ways: immortal youth, immortal life, immortal knowledge, whose acquirement makes man equal to God, because he knows thereby that he and God are

inseparably one thing. And if I have said a word in defence of ancient superstitions, there is one at least which appears to me like a broken bubble. It is that God desires man not to acquire the secret. This jealous guardianship of precious knowledge sprang surely from self-interested cunning in the priests—or were they merely artists whose imaginative gifts required creative outlet? We must be grateful to them for some lovely fables; but it is singular and significant how difficult were made the ways of those who would touch even the symbolic fruit of immortality. Greek, Jew, and Norseman each chose the apple for the divine emblem; but the gods alone might eat thereof, and our sympathy must always be less with them than with the baffled strivers after divinity. We are continually shown godhead withholding an inexhaustible gift from mortality straining to clasp a spiritual dream. Thus Freya's golden orchards are kept for the gods alone, and thus, in her person, they are the first

thing demanded by the mortal, though inhuman, builders of Valhalla. Thus to the First Woman the paradise of Eden was, quite justly, but a mockery of paradise, so long as its most transcendent content remained beyond realization. Are we to suppose that had Eve never eaten of that fruit she and her children would have been condemned for ever to incomplete life in lovely Eden? If perpetual separation from fulfilled divinity was to have been our lot, how grateful must we be to her for the Fall! We shall at least return in knowledge to the place which in the beginning we were created to inhabit in ignorance. Strangest of all strange fables, that Knowledge is Sin! And strange weak Godhead that is made to mutter: "I dare not let Man *know*, lest he discover Me"! That seems to be the attitude throughout. Yet man may dare to know unhurt exactly as much as he can hold, and if there is, as there must be, some supreme overflow of knowledge which his body is still too narrow

a vessel to accept, it is certain that that escaping stream will also be contained in man's, not God's, own time.

The thwarting of Heracles in this connection is easier to resolve than the thwarting of Eve. He also sought the fruit of the tree, but this was only one allotted portion of a destiny which did appear to be regulated by some godlike law. Between the cases of the Mother of mothers and the greatest hero of Grecian myth lies all the difference of enslavement and emancipation. Her tale is a descent, his an ascent. His toils were no penance for Sin, but assume noble proportions as a defined and essential scheme which was to be crowned, through labour, with divinity. Yet it is noticeable that while the hero was permitted to accomplish eleven of his trials in his own person: the one task which touched upon the immortal apple-tree of the Hesperides was in the end achieved through the instrumentality of a soulless monster. Olympus also protected its spiritual

fruits. And heroes who went in search of these locked secrets of the Gods were permitted preferably to stand upon the mountains of the earth and bear the burden of the stars upon their shoulders, rather than that they should pluck with their own hands golden immortality from its bough. Yet while the Gods in this, his eleventh test, barred the road to divinity, they placed no obstacle on the descent to Hades which constituted his twelfth. It was consistent with the old jealous philosophy that during his earthly lifetime man, for all the Gods care, may struggle in desperate contact with black Hell; but never, if the Gods can help it, win to the source of Heaven. To shield their treasure they set four lovely nymphs and a dragon. I can believe there is a guardian spirit still for every tree; but I cannot imagine that it is set there lest we come rashly on a thing we are not ripe to know. For why might giants, clods monstrous and destructible, lay hands upon

these fruits that were denied to man? Were the old Gods fearless of them because, being soulless, they could put their harvest to no uses? while the soul of man, recognizing in the golden fruit its own imperishable seed, might have become divine too soon to be pleasing in the sight of Heaven?

❧ No, that censorship of the soul's liberty is at an end. The dragon Ladon was slain; but the nymphs in their beauty lived on, and freed of his venomous influence were eager, I am sure, to grant the knowledge of joy to any wanderer within their groves. Even as to-day the watchers of the trees stand ready with eyes not of mistrust but welcome for him who comes to find them; and a green gift in their hands.

❧ The legends do, however, appear true to me to this extent: that sacrifice is demanded from the individual who would possess the secret of the trees. Only in the nature of the sacrifice they were mistaken. All who

gained something lost something too. Eve lost her innocence ; Merlin the world ; Odin himself might not bear away a branch of Yggdrasil, the sacred ash that shadowed Mimir's well, until he had cast an eye within the waters ; and the Talking Oak of Dodona would never have spent her wisdom on the Argonauts, but that they must repay her in fifty ways of bitter labour, tormented life, lost friendship and swift death. But we can no longer cling to the superstition that in return for their gift the trees would set pain and denial upon a yoke about the shoulders ; would demand the least toll of suffering, or desire the abnegation of any of the faculties through which man has perception of the beauty of the universe and finds joy in his existence. It is not even an abnegation of self that they demand, but of the artificial layers spread between man and his own soul. ❧ In woods you must be yourself less by a process of becoming what you are than of ceasing to be what you are not. You may

there stand revealed in emotions, but you cannot array yourself in them. The *Précieuse* never could exist in a wood—unless it were one of those painted by Watteau, with his soft consciousness of the landscape-gardener always in the background; at the turn of every alley you expect to meet a dryad in white sculpture. The *Précieuse* could exist in a garden, where the delicate draperies of artifice are, not of course essential but still, permissible, and you may play at loving and living as sundials play at time. We know they are not Time, yet they affect to be so with such graceful sentiment that we are cajoled into accepting the symbol as the thing, and can sigh prettily, but not very deeply, above it.

The difference is notable in Shakespeare's garden and forest comedies. On the one hand, we have *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado*; on the other, *As You Like It* and *The Dream*. In how natural a glamour, sun-coloured in the first, moon-coloured in the second, these

forest romances swim ! its currents flood the characters irresistibly, unlock their personalities, absorb and re-invest them. They follow out the emotional impulse almost helplessly — love and are jealous, grieve, quarrel, and rejoice, without a trace of consciousness. In *Twelfth Night*, a garden-comedy, the personalities retain their consciousness and preserve their manners consummately, save only her whom some tide brings in from the world outside the clipped green peacock alleys, Viola with a heart to stake in a game of counters. Nobody has any manners in Arden (except Jaques, who never was of the forest at all, and was caught too old for the moulding) ; in Arden they do not make love, they love. They love because they must, and we have no doubts of their love, whether Rosalind's and Orlando's, Celia's and Oliver's, Silvius's for Phebe and Phebe's for Ganymede—the uncontrollable impulse has 'em all by the throat. But in the *Twelfth Night* garden

we are not assured of the genuineness of any passion outside Viola's and, he being always her reflection in the play, Sebastian's; and love assumes the shape of a series of fostered whims. The Duke requires only a figure-head on which to lavish his incurable sentimentality, and when irrevocably deprived of this in Olivia, shapes Viola to his needs. Olivia, taken by surprise, is piqued — or piques herself—into loving the first young man she has permitted herself to set eyes upon for months; and that her sentiment was aroused by externals only is proved by her contentment with Cesario's double in the conclusion. Shakespeare is full of instant passions; but he does not convince us that Orsino's and Olivia's rapid changes to Viola and Sebastian are meant to be as real as the rising of love between Oliver and Celia in the forest, or the melting of Phebe to Rosalind; and even in the final pairing of Phebe with her shepherd, he seems barely to suggest that her assent is anything but sub-

mission to destiny—a different matter from Olivia's delighted acceptance of the fate that has been playing tricks with her. Again, where Audrey in her mating is common and ingenuous, Maria is common and cunning; and we know what self-interest and ambition coloured Malvolio's sentiment toward his mistress. In *Twelfth Night* love is made up of assumptions, schemings and circumventions; no one schemes in Arden—we cannot call scheming Rosalind's joyous management of the situation upon which she has by golden fortune alighted. And what a world apart are the sentimentality of Silvius and Orsino! The Duke scents himself with sentimentality as he might perfume his handkerchief; we cannot doubt the lovesick shepherd's to be an essence distilled from his heart. Even in *Much Ado*, where we know the genuine liking of Beatrice for Benedick and Benedick for Beatrice, they will not be honest about it. Once more we are contriving at love in a garden, with little plots

hidden round the corners of an arbour. To the end this pair of lovers leaves unuttered the free and simple declaration. They will not completely raise the mask of laughter from their eyes and let the soul look through. What a generous lack of disguise, on the other hand, sways the emotions of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as soon as they receive their forest-setting; Proteus's swift flush of violence succeeded by his swift flush of shame are more valuable indications than all the by-play of Lorenzo and Jessica who, dallying enchantingly — *à la Précieuse* — in a dusky garden of Belmont, still assume the veil that shall half conceal their feelings. As for *Love's Labour's Lost*, it is pure manners in the King's Park. But manners once more dissolve completely in the wood-mists of *The Dream*, where the entanglements of love are magical but real—no affectations warp the mesh of that net. And where in *Twelfth Night* we see the characters go stepping down the shaven greensward, dancing, when they

do dance, to a conscious measure: in Arden and the forest of *The Dream* we can but watch how Rosalind and her Orlando, and the gay foresters, and fools and shepherds—how fairies, clowns, and lovers flow in and out the trees in a dance unhindered by restraint or thought.

I think there is just this difference between the nature of woods and the nature of gardens—that in woods you may run naked into tree-shaded waters, and be in closer sympathy with your green brothers than before you slipped your garments; while to see you unveiled in a garden would bring a blush to the cheek of the marble nymph in the artificial fountain. And once the import of this has been accepted (that natural things are not shameful things, however much cultivation has sought to make them so), the acceptance must follow that, as the spirit is infinitely greater than the body, to rediscover the body without shame is of

infinitely less significance than fearlessly to discard the spirit's veils. One by one the soul of the forest catches these from man, leaving him in the most sensitive relation to the stream of life that moves beyond the sphere of human vision. He is within the mystery of green living fire that shone on Cathal, walled up to die in the hollow of an oak for the sin which is called love ; and he found instead of death a moonlit spirit of life, that put the dew of a white flower upon his eyes. Then "everywhere he saw tall, fair pale-green lives moving to and fro : some passing out of trees, swift and silent as rain out of a cloud ; some passing into trees, silent and swift as shadows. . . . 'Who are these, Deòin ?' Cathal asked in a low whisper of awe. 'They are my people : the folk of the woods : the green people.' 'But they come out of trees : they come and go like bees in and out of a hive.' 'Trees ? That is your name for us of the woods. *We* are the trees.' '*You* the trees, Deòin ! How

can that be?' 'There is life in your body. Where does it go when the body sleeps, or when the sap rises no more to heart or brain, and there is chill in the blood, and it is like frozen water? Is there a life in your body?' 'Ay, so. I know it.' 'The flesh is *your* body; the tree is *my* body.' 'Then you are the green life of a tree?' 'I am the green life of a tree.'"

Cathal, as perhaps you know (but I cannot resist lingering with him a moment longer), became of the wood-folk, and accepted the law of green life, and learned of Keithoir the god of the green world, who dreams, "and his dreams are Springtide and Summertide and Appletide. When he sleeps without dream there is winter." And in the end Cathal took Deòin into his love, and "hand in hand they fared slowly forth across the moonlit glade. None crossed their path, though everywhere delicate green lives flitted from tree to tree. They heard a wonderful sweet singing, aerial, with a ripple

as of leaves lipping a windy shore of light. A green glamour was in the eyes of Cathal. The green fire of life flamed in his veins."

It is not necessary to die in order to dwell in that green glamour, to glow with that green fire. You cannot mingle long with trees and not become merged with them; you cannot pass among them without something having passed through you. Walking the woodland ways in a great stillness, you have the sense of being on the edge of some imminent life-form that was in action the instant before your coming, and will be resumed the instant you have departed. The elusive mystery seems to be hidden but by the next tree and the last, yet you can never steal upon it, for this life-form exists in your own bosom, and you carry it as you go; the trees have only awakened a deep slumberer to the pitch of dreaming, and realization still awaits its hour.

If you think yourself immune from the power trees have to impress you with their

emotional experience and summon the twin vision of that experience which was a gift to you at your birth : endeavour to preserve, let us say, the pine-feeling among young birch-groves. It is almost impossible to enter a new tree-atmosphere and remain unresponsive to it, and I do not think this is because the human spirit is so pliable that it yields instinctively to whatever mood may temporarily surround it. From the moods induced by human conditions it is, indeed, constantly reacting. For while the tree is deeply symbolic of man, trees in crowds remain far truer to type than men in crowds, and their creative massed emotions touch profounder verities than man in great masses ever approaches. Whatever a single beech may stand for in perfect harmony with itself, a forest of beeches stands for in equally perfect harmony to a deeply intensified degree. Each individual tree in the multitude continues to be creative of the atmosphere in which it can attain its truest expression.

But consider now how men in the multitude continually diverge from the truest expression of man. The more crowded human life becomes with its own kind, where cities have compressed men into swarms, the more essential do withdrawal and solitude become to the units who desire to find themselves and what they stand for. This should not be so ; it does not seem possible that it can have been part of the primal law ; that it is so is against the dream of the common soul of man. Yet it appears true—and I hope it is the result not of nature but of the cities, and some warp in the direction taken by social civilization—that while trees in great companies never forget the common soul, men in great companies seek seldom to remember it. Man dares to realize himself when he is alone, or in the presence of the two or three whose friendship is the inspired knowledge of his internal life ; but before strangers, or in large assemblies, revelation is suppressed from fear of ridicule, or because

we feel too insecure in others of the instant sympathy with which we ourselves would be so ready at the demand of almost any unknown brother. So we are constantly exchanging our littlest rather than our greatest; and those of us who cannot, or dare not, use the gift of free expression, must either acquire the controlled social art which makes external intercourse easy by a sort of pleasant mechanism that has no relation to the roots of nature: or find refuge in silence. It is an awful loneliness which the individual must continually sustain in the human crowd, a spiritual isolation that yearns for swift physical separation. It appears as though the expression of life among multitudes of men must always be a thing contracted or dispersed, except when they are moved to some such violent abandonment of their separate wills as the Bacchanalia demanded of their devotees; or are held in outward silence by some such unifying spell as music or religion—and even here constant divisions

and subdivisions of thought will fret the perfect concord dwelling in a shared common experience, which is a matter lying beyond the limits of thought. But you cannot long consider the separateness of trees in woods, where they are merged into oneness by some common and always lovely, though differing, quality ; and because you too, being sunk in this quality, become as eloquent of it as any single tree, you cannot long hold yourself separate from your surroundings. Thus solitude in woods is neither loneliness nor isolation, if you possess the secret of delivering yourself to it without fear. Even the loneliness of pines, where to be of their mood you must ever move a lonely spirit within a lonely spirit, is a shared loneliness. Have you not too desired to discover within yourself fibres of the remote, not wholly desolate, independence which makes their strength ? They do not shape their lives as other trees, whose character is frequently best contained in their branching off-shoots.

Pines soar so straight to their high ends that their branches seem mere incidents on the barren road, and it is a dark crown they wear in this world; but they go nearer to the stars than all their brethren, and their stark bodies take a red glory of the sun that is given to none other of earth's children. They seem always to be wrapped in their sense of destiny; an unescapable mood which binds your spirit with theirs. And yours at other times will be to share the moods of light, that greater mystery which moulds even the green earth-secret to its conception. . . .

❧ On a shining day I saw very young birches dance like white children knee-deep in blackened heather; and in the dusk of the day I lay upon a slope above still waters among the elfin brakes, pale freakish fronds, little waves curling from the tides of spring about the ankles of pines steeped in their endless revery. The earth, dry-scented with brown needles, fresh-breathing of moss, came

up with a pulse against my cheek, or it was the pulse in myself beating down to her. Then all the glimpses on the further side of memory were astir, the unheard voices and the unseen shapes of a deathless age stole out, and unsurpassable beauty fleeted through the kingdom of the trees. Name called to exquisite name, and I had not to lift my head to know what was about me under the moon of May: faun, dryad, satyr, Syrinx uprisen from her woodland pool, Hylas the lovely boy restored from his, young gleaming forms, a vision of radiant motion set afoot by the piping of the divine Pagan among his temples. I know not whether I was spirit of pine or birch or silver willow. . . . And you, what were you yesterday? the shaken shower of golden birch-light in a strong sun of autumn? the young green chestnut-fans glittering with spring rain? the grey fir wrapped in twilight at the parting of soft forest glades, as though it were the sentinel of dreams? the oak upon the brink of the

glassy lake, watching how the black silence of its surface is pricked with the stars night hangs among your hair? . . . O loveliness of light and night and nature, drawn spiritually from our great brethren of the trees! each interchange of personality is sacramental, and glimmering forms of nymphs that serve the temples behold the dedication, and the note of a low clear reed ripples beyond the pool; the sound of dancing feet is on the turf, of voices like dropping starlight in the dusk. . . .

"Juniper! Sycamore! Sloe! Oleander! . . . Willow, white Willow, step out of the waters! Osier and Alder, run in from the stream! Laurel and Myrtle, come out of your groves! Olive and Almond and Ilex, rise up from the south! Hornbeam, the moon is at crescent, and were you not called for her? Linden whose accent is music, Ash and Acacia that breathe like the wind, O brothers, O sisters, lovelier far than your

own lovely names, let the dance go abroad, for a reed is blown in the rushes, and a sweet flute under the fern, and the harp of the pines is astir. . . .

"All day we have murmured together and our shadows embraced on the floors of the forest. Now Night the unlocker of souls has uplifted her eyelids, and the veils of the sun are withdrawn from her countenance. Then slip from the rind, white sisters, and let hand take hand, while our feet make faint circles of silver that melt on the grass. . . . Sister, what motionless shadow is that at the edge of the lake? . . . Sister, be happy, that shadow will never betray us. The world has died out of his eyes, he watches a star in the clear and unquivering deeps, and the deeps that he sees are as heights to him. The finger of Night the unlocker of souls is laid on his breast and his brow. . . . Lo, from his rind too his spirit arises, as white as our own! his ear has heard music, and see how his

feet come dancing. Reach him your hand, white sister! for he whose body lies yonder is of us, our brother, and by dawnlight will kneel at our temples in knowledge, or he will say I have had a fair dream of the Gods, or he will go from among us forgetting and strange. Dance then without fear while the Huntress glides over the blue hills of heaven, and the Hoofed One makes melody out of the earth. . . ."

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